

Two Sides of the Same Life

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Summary: Tony knew that this would happen. He knew it all along, and had warned me accordingly. Being the obnoxious man he was, I never really paid much attention to it. But it happened. Just as Tony predicted, and the worse part is, it was all my fault. (AU idea for what could have happened after the Civil War has ended).

Two Sides of the Same Life

Chapter 1

Tony knew that this would happen. He knew it all along, and had warned me accordingly. Being the obnoxious man he was, I never really paid much attention to it. It was always me thinking that he was on a high horse for the hundredth time, bragging about how the world couldn't live on without him, even though there would come a day, (that would cut him off in his prime, as he would say), where the world would have to live without him. A smirk and roll of sea blue eyes would be all he'd receive as answer from me. Yes, the world just wouldn't be able to live without Tony Stark. I couldn't help but to lace sarcasm through such a statement. I suppose it was because, in my mind, I had already lived a life far longer than anyone else. It never occurred to me that someone else would live a life so short. But it happened. Just as Tony predicted, and the worse part is, it was all my fault.

"Head up."

Turning to face the voice, I looked over at Bucky who sat in the pew beside me. He had gelled his hair back for the occasion; hands gently laying to rest on a program in his lap. The way he had positioned his hands on the program made it so that half of Stark's cocky smile was hidden; getting slightly smeared beneath sweaty palms. Both him and I shared that quality. Tense situations made both our palms slick up. I was always ashamed of it, but Peggy had once told me that sweat were

the tears of soldiers. Now, I thought, both our hands were crying over the program as we remained stoic in our seats, emotionless like the soldiers we were trained to be.

"Sorry," I said softly.

I lifted my head then, looking at the ebony coffin in front of the pulpit. The priest was reading out of the black Bible perched in his hands. My eyes caught sight of Ms. Potts in the front row, or Pepper as Tony always affectionately liked to call her. A tissue came up in vain, trying to blot the tears out of existence before it caused the mascara to run in a small black stream down her cheeks. I felt my heart clench within my chest. If it had been any other circumstance, I would have jokingly blamed the achy heart on my ninety year old something heart threatening to give out. But no, I couldn't do something like that here. The pain that I was feeling was the same pain I felt when I drove the plane into the ocean, and left Peggy behind. It was the pain of guilt.

I knew that Bucky was still looking at me, but I couldn't bring myself to turn in the pew to face him. He, being my best friend, could still read me like an open book, despite my best attempts to wear a mask to hide behind. So instead of turning to face him, I let my eyes become riveted to the stain glass window where the sunlight was changed into a stream of colors, reflecting off the polished surface of the closed coffin. Ms. Potts had wanted the coffin to be closed during the funeral, and I had respected that. A closed coffin and off to the grave. Ms. Potts had tried to joke that Tony would have wanted it that way.; that if he couldn't be the life of the party, he didn't want to be seen there. The vain attempt at lightening the bleak situation had caused her to cry even harder.

As I stared at the coffin, my mind decided to take one of its trips down memory lane, flashing back to the instant of Tony's death. I blamed myself for having caused the rift in the first place that had led to us being in the building when it fell down. I was blinded by my desire to protect my best friend since, when the table were reversed, he had done the same for me. If I had, had more time to think through matters clearly instead of ploughing ahead in my bullheaded manner, I might have tried to grab Tony, and drag him out before the building collapsed around us. I might have told him I wanted a truce instead of taking turns punching at him like he was a punching bag at Goldie's. Bucky always said that I would leap into fights without thinking. I suppose this last one wasn't any different.

I was so lost in the recesses of my own mind that I didn't realize we had reached the end of the service until Bucky reached down to lay his hand upon my shoulder. Snapping out of my thoughts and turning to look at him, I could see the faint smile that he had tried to muster up on his face. As I said before, Bucky could read me like an open book. Now that he was mainly back to the man he used to be, he knew how guilty I felt about Tony's death, and how I felt like I was the one to blame. It also made Bucky feel bad when I did that though, hating himself for making me have to be in that spot in the first place. Half of me wondered if I shouldn't have tried to enlist for the war again all those decades ago, and instead gone to collect scrap metal to help the effort. But no. Every time I thought that, I knew that I never would have wanted otherwise, no matter if I had known the outcome all that time. Every other man had been lying down

their life. It would have never felt right for me to stay behind.

I followed the surge of black that spewed out from the church, idling on the steps as I watched car after car follow the hearse towards the cemetery. I knew that I ought to go there and pay my final respects, but the fact that it was final made me stay frozen on the concrete steps even longer. Bucky appeared by my side then, and slipped his arm through mine to loop our arms together, escorting me off the steps like the elderly man I was. He walked at a brisk pace towards where our vehicle was, not even looking in my direction. I couldn't tell if Bucky was agitated with me or was trying to protect me. It may be easy to read me, but it was so hard to read him. I got my answer to my pondering as we came to a stop at the car.

"You need to snap out of this. I know death isn't easy to bounce back from, but you look like you're out of that horrifying show on the televisionâ€¦" Bucky was fiddling with the car keys by this point as he tried to remember the show that he had been thinking about. Since being in my current condition of despair, I had only allowed myself to watch depressing programs off the television in an attempt to make myself feel better, and of course, Bucky had been forced to watch them too because it was what was on.

"What show?" I asked, watching him closely as his sweat-slicked fingers slipped over the silver surface of the keys.

"That one where they're all like..." He stretched both arms out in front of him, tilting his head off extremely to one side as he mocked lumbering movements with his legs, letting out a small groan. I couldn't help but to crack a hint of a smile then, even though the situation wasn't anything to smile about.

"You mean that zombie show I was watching the other night?"

"Yes! Except for the facial features, but I mean, you still have the same pallor as them, and you're walking about like a dead man. You need to figure out a way to deal with this."

I shrugged. Easier to say than do. I could tell my shrug was getting Bucky upset, for he turned from me then and practically stabbed the key into the key hole in the car door.

"You forget that casualties are a part of war, Steve."

"Yes, but it's a war that I caused, Bucky."

"Don't start this again..." groaned Bucky, pressing his forehead against the car. "I told you before, as I've told you a hundred times before that, if it's anyone's fault, it's mine. I let Hydra get into my head and mess it up."

"Yes, but I should have tried harder to reach you. Maybe we could have both made it...Maybe..."

"You see, Steve? This is exactly what your problem is," said Bucky as he turned around to face me. "You're too busy focusing on what could have been instead of what actually happened. I know you like to think that you're the hero that everyone needs, but even heroes have their faults."

He turned back to the car then, leaving me with a deep set frown upon my face, and a still down-in-the-dumps spirit. As Bucky slipped into the driver's seat, I moved about the car to slip into the passenger's seat. I buckled myself up in silence. I couldn't talk to Bucky, because once again, he was right. There was no way to fix what had happened. This was just me trying to alleviate myself of some guilt. Shame crept into me then as I slunk down into the seat.

The scene outside the car seemed to fade away as Bucky drove me towards the cemetery. In my head, I was rehearsing a hundred-and-one different things to say over Tony's grave, but none sounded adequate. They all sounded weak compared to the enormity of what had happened. This wasn't some well-to-do wish as you sent someone off to college, nor a good luck call as you got ready to brave an obstacle. This was death. There was no greater obstacle than that. All would eventually face it, and all would succumb to it. Even the greatest of men would someday be overcome by its power, and get buried ten feet under. It was a reality that would face everyone someday, me included. I may have cheated death once in my life, but I doubt I should ever be so lucky again.

Luckily we had stalled just enough, and traffic had been just backed up enough that we arrived just as people were starting to leave the cemetery. Bucky parked the car as I turned to look at the sole person left standing there. Ms. Potts stood firmly in front of the coffin as it hovered above its new home. I knew I ought to go to her and try to console her, but I didn't even know where to begin. Death was death. It was so final, and it was my fault. Bucky reached over to pat my hand, giving it a gentle squeeze.

"You know, life will go on eventually. It's harsh to say, but it's true. You've just gotta fight through this."

Of course I knew that life went on. Of anyone, I should know. Life had moved on despite the fact that I was frozen for decades. People had moved on, but though they had, they had never forgotten. Time moved on, but it couldn't eradicate your presence from the minds of those that loved you. I turned and watched Ms. Potts gently stroke the lid as they got ready to lower it. I steeled myself up. I couldn't continue to sit here like a coward, and drown in my self pity. I was needed at the moment. I had to do the decent thing and apologize, even though I'm sure I'm the last person that she wanted to see.

Getting out of the car, I made my way across the crisply cut grass to where Ms. Potts was standing. Hearing me approach, she lifted her head and stared straight at me. It was a stare of such sadness and spite that it froze me in my tracks. I buried my hands in my pockets and looked down at the ground beneath my feet.

"I wasn't expecting you to show up to the funeral," she said, cutting through the silence.

"I felt I owed it to Tony to."

As I lifted my head up, I saw her press her lips into a firm line, waving a finger at me as if I were a naughty child who had just said a bad word.

"No. Don't ever say his name again. You don't deserve to. It's your

fault he's dead."

I flushed red then, looking back down at my feet as I heard a car door slam behind me, signifying that Bucky had gotten out of the car.

"Oh, and I see you brought your accomplice with you."

"Look, I'm sorry..."

"No. I don't want any apologies from you. Apologies won't bring Tony back. He's dead, and you're going to have to live with the guilt."

I brought my head up then to see that she was marching towards me. I cringed a bit, thinking that she was coming towards me to slap me. She instead surprised me by thrusting an envelope at my chest, half crumpling it in your hurried hand off.

"I don't know why, but this was among Tony's things. It was addressed to you. Though I can't accept your apologies, and don't want to see either you or your friend right now, I respect Tony's last wishes. I'd assume he would want you to have whatever is in there."

I mumbled a thanks, but I doubt she heard it as she brushed past me to walk to her car. Bucky finally reached where I was standing, leaving the two of us alone with the coffin and the people ready to bury Tony. I turned to see that Bucky had raised a brow at the envelope that now lay to rest in my hands.

"What's that?"

I shrugged. I didn't know, but I would find out. I excused myself from Bucky and went to a more secluded area of the cemetery to have a look at the letter. Leaning my back against a tree that was a few burial plots away, I ran my finger along the opposite side of the envelope to open it and reveal its secrets. Turning it upside down in my hand, a letter flutter out along with an odd coin that plopped into the grass at my feet. Raising a brow, I bent down to snatch the coin up from the grass, noticing then that it was one that Tony obviously had created. On one side was his face, etched in the coin with a gold tinge, while on the opposite side it boldly proclaimed in an arch: Stark Enterprises. Hiding the coin within my fist, I turned my attention back to the letter, figuring that it would explain the reason why I had this coin.

The letter was something rather long for Tony. Tony wasn't a man of words. He was a man of action. Therefore, I couldn't believe the amount of words that Tony had written out in his own hand, and just for me. And, of course, in his trademark, sarcastic style, he had to start out the letter by being a prick.

_If you're reading this right now, Rogers, it means that you messed up. Of course, I always knew you would. I told you before that I would be cut off in my prime, and this is an indicator of it. I even had the foresight to write you this letter. I _never _write letters._

_If things go the way that I want them to, you'll receive this right around the time of my death. I will leave it behind with my things for Pepper to find. She'll give it to you, even if she hates your

guts for offing a devilishly handsome man like myself. The coin you'll find with this letter is one that can turn the tables on everything, and I'm entrusting you with this choice. _

_I've never given you any reason at all to like me, so I shouldn't expect you to use the coin to right this situation, and yes, before you re-read that sentence and think you read it wrong, I did say that the coin can be used to right this situation. Every person's life is as unpredictable as a flip of a coin. You either land on success or failure, true love or heartbreak, and so on. All these things happen. You don't know what you'll get. You'll only know that it'll end up on one thing or the other. Never both. But what if you were in control of this metaphorical coin of life? What if you didn't like the outcome, and flipped again for another one? _

_This coin will allow you to save me, if you so choose to use it that way. If you choose to leave me dead, that is your choice, and it is now in your hands. The machine that is operated with this coin is housed in my workshop. Jarvis will give you access. You'll only have to worry about Pepper if she's around. _

_Just like I knew my end would come too soon, I know that you'll make the right decision in this case, Rogers. Even if we are at odds sometimes, we still do trust each other. It's what a team is for.

_

_I knew you'd mess up, but that's okay. Even the best of heroes make the worst mistakes. _

__Tony Stark _

I had to read the letter through at least two more times to try to garner what he was saying. Was he really trying to say that the coin I held clutched in my hand right at this moment would allow me to fix the fact that he was dead? I couldn't help, but to be relieved at the thought. Maybe I didn't have to live with all this guilt. Maybe there was a way to lighten this burden. My intentions may be a bit selfish, but I also knew that Tony would have so much more to offer if he were still alive. I owed it to him, and I owed it to his father to fix this. I just had to.

I could tell that Bucky was eager to know what was in the letter that I had been given as I walked back towards him, but I didn't have time to engage in idle chit-chat at the moment. I strode towards the car with a new found purpose, losing myself to thoughts on how to get into Tony's workshop that I didn't even notice that Bucky was talking to me until he grabbed my arm, and pulled me to a sudden stop.

"Steve, what in the world is going on in that head of yours today?

I locked my eyes with his, and for the first time since Tony's death, I cracked the smallest of smiles.

"The fact that life does move on, but it also can go back."

I could tell my answer puzzled Bucky, but before he could question what I was saying, I had already slipped into the driver's seat and buckled up, slipping Tony's letter and coin into the breast pocket of my tuxedo.

"Either get in and go along for the ride, or stay here," I said as I turned the keys that Bucky had left in the ignition.

Rolling his eyes, Bucky clambered into the passenger seat and buckled up.

"Sometimes I worry about you..." said Bucky with a slight chuckle.

"You can stop worrying soon enough," I said as I began to navigate the car out of the cemetery.

"So, where are we going exactly?" asked Bucky.

"To find the solution to this problem," I said, leaving that cryptic answer in the air as I drove towards Stark's place.

It was time to flip the coin, and change this outcome.

End
file.